

RED EYE TETRA, *Moenkhausia sanctaefilomenae*

DIFFICULT TO BREED?

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Jan-Feb 1997



The common Red Eye Tetra

EASY TO BREED FISH

A few years ago I learned a lesson in breeding fish that I will never forget. I had a pair of Red Eye Tetras (*Moenkhausia sanctaefilomenae*) that I was trying to spawn. They are fairly common in pet stores and I had heard that they were easy to breed. I had bred a number of tetras previously and thought that this fish would be an easy addition to my Breeder Award Program (BAP) points. Like the Black Tetra, another easy to spawn fish, I set a conditioned pair up in a bare 10 gallon tank with fresh tapwater and some plastic plants. After almost a week and no spawn, I separated the pair and conditioned them again with heavy feedings of high protein foods (frozen, live, and dry) for over a week. The female was very plump and appeared ready to spawn. I set them up again and waited----no spawn! Maybe they needed more acid water and acid conditions like some of the more difficult tetras, so after further conditioning, I set the pair up in a tank with a peat moss filter in a darker area of my fishroom---still no spawn! I was getting desperate. I decided to try rainwater next. I then set up a tank of rainwater with a box filter, put the pair in, and went to bed. The next morning I woke up expecting to find eggs in the tank, but instead found a dead female!

TRY AGAIN

Not to be denied, about 3 months later, I purchased another pair of these fish and tried to spawn them several times, varying the conditions of the breeding tank in many ways. Live plants, charcoal filters, undergravel filters, fresh water, aged water, old tank water, softened water, bright light, low light, cooler temperatures, warmer temperatures, etc.---still no spawning or eggs! At this point I decided that they were too difficult for me to spawn and gave up on them.

FINALLY SUCCESS

About a year later, I was in a fish store and noticed some Red Eye Tetras that looked very healthy. I think that I had a short memory lapse, because I bought a pair and brought them home! I was intending to separate them for conditioning but did not have a place to put them, and was already planning all the different conditions that I might spawn them in. The only tank available was a 10 gallon tank with tapwater and plastic plants, so I put them in it, intending to separate and condition them the next day. Well, you guessed it: they spawned the next morning! The eggs were fertile and the fry easy to raise with newly hatched brine shrimp. My difficult to spawn species suddenly became very easy!

LESSON LEARNED

The lesson I learned was that the fish themselves are most important, not the conditions to spawn them in. Most fish will spawn in widely varying conditions, but they must be healthy, compatible, and fertile to spawn for you. The previous pairs of Red Eye Tetras that I had tried to spawn were possibly infertile, old, incompatible, or the females eggbound. Exposure to chemicals, pollution, or improper water when fish are young could possibly make them sterile. Since we often don't know the history of fish we are buying, the ideal would be for a person to buy at least 6-8 young fish of a given species that they intend to breed, if possible from 2 different sources. Fish bought from aquarium club auctions and quality fish stores are often more easily spawned than those bought from big pet store chains.

WHY NOT TRY?

The egg scatterers (Tetras, Barbs, Danios, etc.) are not seen very often as fry in club auctions, and usually must be bought in stores. This has given many of these species a "difficult to breed" label when actually they can be quite easy to breed if healthy, fertile fish are obtained. Usually all this requires is a little patience in selecting the healthiest fish. Certainly there are species that are difficult to spawn. However, if one stays with easy to breed species, breeding the egg scatterers can be fun and rewarding. Some tetras that are easy to breed in tapwater are: Black Tetra, Buenos Aires Tetra, Blind Cave Fish, Serpae Tetra, Pristella Tetra, Glowlight tetra, and Emperor Tetra. If you intend to keep and breed tetras over long periods of time, softer water that is neutral or slightly acid is better to keep them in to prevent them from becoming sterile or eggbound. This can be accomplished by using a peat moss filter to soften and acidify the water. I hope that more people become interested in keeping and breeding the egg scattering fishes. Most are colorful, peaceful, small, and in general, good community tank fish.